

Lincoln Bedroom

An Excerpt from Supreme Court Justice Neil Gorsuch's forthcoming book: "A Republic, If You Can Keep It"

On a beautiful autumn afternoon in 2016, I found myself sitting outside enjoying lunch with a friend. In kind tones, he told me that he thought it was a shame I hadn't made then-candidate Donald Trump's publicly announced list of potential Supreme Court nominees. No matter, I replied: I was very happy with my job as a federal circuit judge and loved my life in Colorado. Soon enough the conversation moved on, a lazy meal ended, and we said our goodbyes. But before I managed to walk a block, my phone buzzed. It was a text from my lunch companion: A new, second list just came out and I had to see it.

Looking back, I can see that this moment marked the beginning of the end of my life as I had known it. It wasn't so obvious at the time. Even as the election neared, the polls reported that candidate Trump had little chance of becoming President Trump. What's more, my friends told me, the second list was just a courtesy or maybe for show and only the first list mattered; so even if the polls proved wrong, there was no way I'd wind up the nominee. All that sounded about right to me.

It came as a surprise, then, when I received a call two months later asking me to come to Washington to interview with the Vice President-elect. And it was an even greater surprise when, soon after that, the President-elect asked me to visit him in New York for a second interview.

The shock still hadn't worn off when I found myself sitting with my wife, Louise, in the White House on January 31, 2017. I could hardly believe that later in the evening the President would announce to the nation his intention to nominate me to the Supreme Court. The formal nomination would be transmitted to the Senate first thing the next day, February 1, on what would have been my father's eightieth birthday. It was a lot to take in.

Not just for me, but for my family too. Earlier in the day, the President tweeted: "Getting ready to deliver a VERY IMPORTANT DECISION! 8:00 P.M." The media knew the decision concerned the Supreme Court pick but had no idea who the nominee would be. Television commentators speculated all day. Meanwhile, I sat quietly in the Lincoln Bedroom working on my remarks for the evening's announcement.

The President had offered me that historic spot as an office for the day. Knowing that Louise was born and raised in England, he gave her the use of the bedroom across the hall typically reserved for Queen Elizabeth and once occupied by Winston Churchill. Finding a little time late in the day, Louise rang her father back in England to tell him the news, but before she could say anything my father-in-law interjected that he had stayed up to watch the announcement.

He had seen all the reporting, and he was sure that a friend of mine was about to get the nod. Louise replied that she was *pretty* sure I was the pick. No, he countered, the other fellow was caught on television just now driving toward Washington, and the newscasters were sure it was him. My father-in-law wasn't even convinced when Louise told him that we had slipped through the White House kitchen entrance and were now in the Lincoln Bedroom. Maybe the real nominee was in a room down the hall?

To be fair to my father-in-law, I was almost as surprised as he that I was busy preparing for a nationally televised appearance in the White House. Only days earlier, I was happily living on a quiet country road called Lookout Ridge outside Niwot, Colorado, a little town named for a great Arapaho chief. Yes, I had written hundreds of judicial decisions over the last decade, sitting on an appellate court that serves about 20 percent of the continental United States. But few people outside of legal circles knew who I was.

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